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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000167

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [USAU](#) [IS](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN JUNTA ASKS ISRAELIS TO LEAVE

REF: A. A. HANKINS/OPS CENTER TELCON 3/1/2009
[1](#)B. B. STATE 14163
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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Israeli Ambassador Miki Arbel called Charge evening of March 1 advising that he had been convoked that afternoon by the MFA Secretary General and asked to reciprocate actions taken by the Mauritanian authorities by closing his embassy and leaving. The Secretary General said Mauritania had told its Arab partners that it would take actions in response to the Israeli actions in Gaza but that those actions were seen as being incomplete. Arbel told the Secretary General that he was shocked by the Mauritanian actions and would have to seek instructions from his capital. The Secretary General told the Ambassador that the Mauritians had expected the Israeli's to take these actions weeks ago when they had advised them of their decision to freeze relations and asking the Israeli's to take "appropriate measures" by which they meant to say "reciprocal" actions. Arbel indicated that he had taken "appropriate measures" by maintaining a low profile. Arbel told Charge that Tel Aviv had asked him to immediately brief the U.S. Embassy and indicated that Israel would be demarching European capitals on Monday seeking assistance to reverse the regime's decision. Arbel noted that Foreign Minister Livni intends to raise Mauritania with Secretary Clinton during their scheduled meeting March 3.

[1](#)2. (C) Given the continued unavailability of the MFA Director for North American Affairs Ahmed Deya who has put off meetings, requested in response to ref B, with A/DCM for over a week (Deya has been working out of the Interior Minister trying to implement a new directive to allow voting by expatriate Mauritians during the regime's intended June elections), Charge secured a meeting with the Secretary General Mohameden Ould Sidi dit Bedena on March 2 to deliver REF B demarche. In addition to the points made in reftel, Charge stressed the negative repercussions of any decision to sever ties with Israel including (a) publicly aligning Mauritania with the extremist Middle Eastern view expressed by Hamas, Syria and Iran thereby undermining the regime's claim that it provides the best long-term option for security and stability in the region, which would (b) undermine U.S. relations in the long term and likely force the regime's less severe European critics (Spain and Germany) to take a tougher line in regards to the coup. Charge noted that soon after the coup, the regime's Foreign Minister had cited President Abdallahi's diplomatic contacts with Libya and Iran as a

dangerous trend that justified the coup. The actions taken by the regime since the coup demonstrate a stronger leaning towards extremist regimes.

13. (C) The Secretary General did not raise his discussion with Ambassador Arbel but quickly defended Mauritanian policy regarding Israel saying, "At the time of Taya, the government took a courageous decision -- against the will of most Mauritians -- to establish relations with Israel because we thought that was the best contribution that we could make at the time for long term peace in the region. At the Doha Summit, General Aziz determined that the best contribution the current government could make was to freeze -- not cut -- relations with Israel." He added that, "Whatever you may think, we base our policy towards Israel on our own interests. Our relations were not established to please America nor will they be cut to retaliate against the U.S. now or to please Iran, Syria, or anyone else." Charge noted that Mauritania had chosen the extremist line in relation to the Palestinian issue -- one that important partners like Egypt and Saudi Arabia (in addition to the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people) reject in favor of dialogue. The Secretary General stressed that "Mauritania continues to be committed to a long term relationship with Israel" and had clearly decided to "freeze" rather than "cut" ties. Charge noted that "freezing relations" is not part of the standard diplomatic vocabulary and asked for a definition. The Secretary General said, "We have closed our embassy, shipped our furnishings back home, and brought back our Ambassador and we expect Israel to act in a reciprocal fashion. We have not, however, changed the legal status of

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our relations with Israel. We still have those relations and our Ambassador remains the Ambassador to Israel. If and when the situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians suggests a durable peace, there is nothing to preclude us renting a new chancery and sending our Ambassador back." Charge noted it was unusual that Mauritania would take a unilateral action and then expect Israel to respond in kind. The Secretary General only responded, "that is how we view reciprocity."

14. (C) Charge will be briefing Ambassador Arbel on this demarche this afternoon. The Secretary General took particular note of the arguments that a rupture of relations with Israel would tend to undermine U.S. -- particularly Congressional -- support for any future Mauritanian government -- legitimate or otherwise. He also noted the argument that aligning Mauritania with the Hamas/Syrian/Iranian hard-line would alienate Mauritania politically and potentially lead to a hardened European response to the regime. Our sense is that the timing of the Mauritanian action is driven by Qaddafi's emerging mediation initiative on Mauritania. With Tripoli already seen as biased towards the military regime, the Mauritians are likely trying to curry favor with Tripoli hoping Qaddafi, as AU President, will act contrary to the AU's hard line policy.

Qaddafi is expected to arrive in Mauritania this week installing his tent-palace in the middle of the national stadium to initiate talks between Aziz, Abdallahi and Ould Daddah. The junta may want to be able to tell the Guide they've kicked out the Israelis before the process begins.

WALSH